



MY PSYCHIC EXPERIENCES

SIR A. CONAN DOYLE

I am happy to give some general idea of my psychic experiences and conclusions, but cannot in this limited space go into very lengthy detail or complete argument upon the subject. It is the more unnecessary since I have already in successive volumes outlined very clearly how I arrived at my present knowledge. Of these volumes the first and second, called respectively 'The New Revelation' and 'The Vital Message,' show how gradual conviction was given me of the continuation of life, and how thorough and long were my studies before I was at last beaten out of my material agnostic position and forced to admit the validity of the proofs.

In the days of universal sorrow and loss, when the voice of Rachel was heard through the land, it was borne in upon me that the knowledge which had come to me thus was not for my own consolation alone, but that God has placed me in a very special position for conveying it to that world which needed it so badly.

I found in the moment many men who saw the truth as clearly as I did; but such was the clamour of the 'religious,' who were opposing that which is the very essence of living religion of the 'scientific,' who broke the first laws of science by pronouncing upon a thing which they had not examined, and of the Press, who held up every real or imaginary rascality as being typical of a movement which they had never understood, that the true men were abashed and shrank from the public exposition of their views. It was to combat this that I began a campaign in 1916 which can only finish when all is finished.

One great help I had. My wife had always been averse from my psychic studies, deeming the subject to be uncanny and dangerous. Her own experiences soon

convinced her to the contrary, for her brother, who was killed at Mons, came back to us in a very convincing way. From that instant she threw herself with all the whole-hearted energy of her generous nature into the work which lay before us.

A devoted mother, she was forced often to leave her children; a lover of home, she was compelled to leave it for many months at a time; distrustful of the sea, she joyfully shared my voyages. We have now travelled a good 50,000 miles upon our quest. We have spoken face to face with a quarter of a million of people. Her social qualities, her clear sanity, her ardent charity, and her gracious presence upon the platforms, all united with her private counsel and sympathy, have been such an aid to me that they have turned my work into a joy. The presence of our dear children upon our journeys has also lightened them for both of us.

Apart from the two small books in which I have unfolded my argument, I have written 'The Wanderings of a Spiritualist,' where the reader may accompany me in my propaganda work in Australia and New Zealand. Then in my 'American Adventure' he can read how we carried the message to the eastern portion of the United States, the land whence the great breaking of barriers was first effected.

Now, in a second volume of 'American Adventures,' I have put on record all that befell us during our long and arduous tour of 1922, when we crossed the United States and returned by Canada, lecturing in every large city on the way. I will not go into these matters, since I have already dealt with them in such detail, and I can only refer the reader who is interested to the volumes which I have named.

For the moment, the real importance of such records is not comprehended, but the day will come, and that speedily, when people will understand that this the proposition for which we are now fighting is far most important thing for two thousand years in the history of the world, and when the efforts of the pioneers will have

a very real interest to all who have sufficient intelligence to follow the progress of human thought.

I am only one of many working for the cause, but I hope that I may claim that I brought into it a combative and aggressive spirit which it lacked before, and which has now so forced it upon public attention that one can hardly pick up a paper without reading some comment upon it. If some of these papers are hopelessly ignorant and prejudiced, it is not a bad thing for the cause. If you have a bad case constant publicity is a misfortune, but if you have a good one its goodness will always assert itself, however much it may be misrepresented.

Many spiritualists have taken the view that since we know these comforting and wonderful things, and since the world chooses not to examine the evidence, we may be content with our own happy assurance. This seems to me an immoral view.

If God has sent a great new message of exceeding joy down to earth, then it is for us, to whom it has been clearly revealed, to pass it on at any cost of time, money and labour. It is not given to us for selfish enjoyment, but for general consolation. If the sick man turns from the physician, then it cannot be helped but at least the healing draught should be offered.

The greater the difficulty in breaking down the wall of apathy, ignorance and materialism, the more is it a challenge to our manhood to attack and ever attack in the same bulldog spirit with which Foch faced the German lines.

I trust that the record of my previous life may show that I have within my limitations preserved a sane and balanced judgment, since I have never hitherto been extreme in my views, and since what I have said has so often been endorsed by the actual course of events. But never have I said anything with the same certainty of conviction with which I now say that this new knowledge is going to sweep the earth and to revolutionise

human views upon every topic save only on fundamental morality, which is a fixed thing.

All modern inventions and discoveries will sink into insignificance beside those psychic facts which will force themselves within a few years upon the universal human mind.

The subject has been obscured by the introduction of all sorts of side issues, some of interest but not vital, others quite irrelevant. There is a class of psychic researcher who loves to wander round in a circle, and to drag you with him if you are weak enough to accept such guidance. He trips continually over his own brains, and can never persuade himself that the true simple and obvious explanation is also the true one. His intellect becomes a positive curse to him, for he uses it to avoid the stright road and to fashion out some strange devious path which lands him at last in a quagmire, whilst the direct and honest mind has kept firmly to the highway of knowledge.

When I meet men of this type, and then come in contact with lowly the congregations of religious spiritualists, I think always of Christ's words when He thanked God that He had revealed these things to babes and withheld them from the wise and the prudent. I think also of a dictum of Baron Reichenbach: 'There is a scientific incredulity which exceeds in stupidity the obtuseness of the clod-hopper.'

For really the matter is so simple. A child can understand it—indeed, my children do understand it in a practical way a good deal better than the average man of learning and science. One needs no experience oneself—though experience is always helpful. It is a question of evidence.

If a man can carefully read such first hand experiences as Crookes' 'Research upon spiritualism,' Crawford's two books upon physical phenomena, and the chapters in Wallace's Autobiography which deal with the subject, and if a comparison of these documents does

not convince him of external intelligence, then I claim that that man's mind is not well-balanced and his logical sense is wanting.

But once you have got so far as to realise that we are in touch with outside intelligences, then to ask their views upon religious truth is clearly the most natural thing in the world. In their answers to these questions lies the purified and inspired religion of the future, which shows how for mankind has in the course of centuries forgotten and misread the earlier message, losing touch with that communion which is the very essence of all things spiritual.

This is the work which we are doing, and woe to the man who deliberately stands in the way of it! Often the judgment falls upon him in this earth. Always it does in the next. Those who have had experience of the work of rescue circles* will know the truth of what I say. There is a responsibility there which has not yet been recognised. People think they are judging the unseen, when in truth the unseen is judging them.

But what I say in no way applies to the reasonable researcher whose experiences are real stepping-stones leading to his fixed conclusion. There must to every man be this novitiate in knowledge. The matter is too serious to be taken without due intellectual conviction.

My own state of probation, starting as I did from pure theism, was a long one. I recognise now that it was for too long, and that I was greatly to blame. Still I did get there at last, and I endeavoured to atone. So it was with some great open-minded men like Myers, Hodgson, and Hyslop, who waited far too long, and yet did in the end show that they had an earnest purpose in view. I have not spoken of such, for I respect them. But I do not respect many of our opponents. They are often dishonest in their methods. In some cases, I am

* Rescue circles are those seances where undeveloped spirits return in order to seek the advice and teaching of living men and women who are above them in spiritual knowledge. A typical rescue circle is described in my 'Wanderings of a Spiritualist,'—A. C. D.

sorry to say, they will go the length of committing fraud upon mediums, or of sending in deliberately false reports in order to maintain their negative conclusions.

I could give several cases of this which have come within my own knowledge. A classical case, obvious to all the world, was that of Sir David Brewster, who denied in the Press certain phenomena shown him by D. D. Home. After his death his sister published his letters, and lo! there was one to her in which he admitted in private those very same phenomena! And yet Brewster is still held in honour, and Home in many quarters is even now regarded as a charlatan! So, too Robert Browning wrote a poem 'Mr. Sludge the Medium,' to celebrate how he had exposed Home, without one word of truth in it from start to finish. We have to watch our mediums, but even more we have to watch the so-called 'exposers.'

It must not be imagined that I entirely deny the existence of fraud. But it is far less common than is supposed, and as far its being universal, which is the theory of the conjurors and some of the researchers such an opinion is beyond reason or argument. In an experience with mediums which has been excelled by very few living men, and which has embraced three continents, I have not encountered fraud more than three or four times.

There is conscious and unconscious fraud, and it is the existence of the latter which complicates the question so badly. Conscious fraud usually arises from a temporary failure of real psychic power, and a consequent attempt to replace it by an imitation. Unconscious fraud comes in that curious half-way state which I have called the 'half-trance condition,' when the medium seems normal, and yet is actually hardly responsible for his actions.

At such a time the process by which his personality leaves his body seems to have set in, and his higher qualities have already passed, so that he can apparently no longer inhibit the promptings received from the

suggestion of those around him, or from his own unchecked desires. Thus one will find mediums doing stupid and obvious things which expose them to the charge of cheating. Then, if the observer disregards these and waits, the true psychic phenomena and unmistakable character will follow as the medium sinks more deeply into trance.

This was, I gather, noticeable in the case of Eusapia Paladino, but I have seen it with several others. In those cases where a medium has left the cabinet, and is found wandering about among the sitters, as has happened with Mrs Corner, with Madame d'Esperance, and with Craddock—all of them mediums who have given many proofs of their real powers—I am convinced that the very natural supposition that they are fraudulent is really quite a mistaken one.

When, on the other hand, it is found that the medium has introduced false drapery or accessories, which has sometimes occurred, we are in the presence of the most odious and blasphemous crime which a human being can commit.

People ask me, not unnaturally, what is it which makes me so perfectly certain that this thing is true. That I am perfectly certain is surely demonstrated by the mere fact that I have abandoned my congenial and lucrative work, left my home for long periods at a time, and subjected myself to all sorts of inconveniences and losses in order to get the facts home to the people.

To give all my reasons would be to write a book rather than an article, but I may say briefly that there is no physical sense which I possess which has not been separately assured, and that there is no conceivable method by which a spirit could show its presence which I have not on many occasions experienced. In the presence of Miss Besinnet as medium and of several witnesses I have seen my mother and my nephew, young Oscar Hornung, as plainly as ever I saw them in life—so plainly that I could almost have counted the wrinkles of the one and the freckles of the other.

In the darkness the face of my mother shone up, peaceful, happy, slightly inclined to one side, the eyes closed. My wife upon my right and the lady upon my left both saw it as clearly as I did. The lady had not known my mother in life, but she said, "How wonderfully like she is to her son," which will show how clear was the detail of the features.

In the presence of Mr. Evan Powell my son came back to me. Six persons heard his conversation with me, and signed a paper afterwards to that effect. It was in his voice and concerned itself with what was unknown to the medium, who was bound and breathing deeply in his chair. If the evidence of six persons of standing and honour may not be taken, then how can any human fact be established?

My brother, General Doyle, came back with the same medium, but on another occasion. He discussed the health of his widow. She was a Danish lady, and he wanted her to use a masseur in Copenhagen. He gave the name. I made inquiries and found that such a man did exist. Whence came this knowledge? Who was it who took so close an interest in the health of this lady? If it was not her dead husband then who was it?

All the fine-drawn theories of the subconscious go to pieces before the plain statement of the intelligence: 'I am a spirit. I am Innes. I am your brother.'

I have clasped materialised hands.

I have held long conversations with the direct voice.

I have smelt the peculiar ozone-like smell of ectoplasm,

I have listened to prophecies which have been quickly fulfilled.

I have seen the 'dead' glimmer up on a photographic plate which no hand but mine had touched.

I have received through the hand of my own wife notebooks full of information which was utterly beyond her ken.

I have seen heavy articles swimming in the air, untouched by human hand, and obeying directions given to unseen operators.

I have seen spirits walk round the room in fair light and join in the talk of the company.

I have known an untrained woman possessed by an artist spirit, and rapidly produce a picture now hanging in my drawing-room which few living painters could have bettered.

I have read books which might have come from great thinkers and scholars, and which were actually written by unlettered men who acted as the medium of the unseen intelligence, so superior to his own. I have recognised the style of a dead writer which no parodist could have copied, and which was written in his own handwriting.

I have heard singing beyond earthly power, and whistling done with no pause for the intake of breath.

I have seen objects from a distance projected into a room with closed doors and windows.

I have seen bright lights shooting round the room, or darting in long flashes from the medium's head.

If a man could see, hear and feel all this, and yet remain unconvinced of unseen intelligent forces around him, he would have good cause to doubt his own sanity. Why should he heed the chatter of irresponsible journalists, or the herd shaking of inexperienced men of science, when he has himself had so many proofs? They are babies in this matter, and should be sitting at his feet.

It is not, however, a question to be argued in a detached and impersonal way, 'as if one were talking of the Baconian theory or the existence of Atlantis. It is intimate, personal, and vital to the last degree.

A closed mind means an earthbound soul, and that in turn means future darkness and misery. If you know what is coming you can avoid it. If you do not, you run grave risk. Some Jeremiah or Savonarola is needed who will shriek this into the ears of the world.

A new conception of sin is needed. The mere carnal frailties of humanity, the weakness of the body are not to be lightly condoned, but are not the serious part of the human reckoning.

It is the fixed condition of mind, narrowness, bigotry, materialism—in a word, the sins not of the body, but of the spirit, which are the real permanent things, and condemn the individual to the lower spheres until he has learnt his lesson.

We know this from our rescue circles when these poor souls come back to bewail their errors and to learn those truths which they might have learnt here, had their minds not been closed by apathy or prejudice.

We have ample cause and material for appealing to mankind through their fears rather than through their reason if we are forced to such a course. So stringent is the law that even spiritualists suffer if they have allowed the scientific side of the subject to outweigh the religious.

I know no more remarkable dialogue than that between the "dead" Hodgson and the living Hyslop through the entranced Mrs. Piper, as recorded in Funk's "Psychic Riddle". It is a lesson for all of us. If Hodgson had bitter regrets, who is safe.

The whole record of science in connection with this subject is very analogous to its record with mesmerism and it is curious that no lesson was learned from that humiliating incident.

For seventy years the existence of this strange power was denied, its advocates were told that they were either cheats or dupes, its marvels were treated as fraudulent, its medical use was branded as quackery and papers upon the subject were forbidden in learned societies.

Finally there came a time when every visitor to a village fair could see the force in operation, and a few surgeons in advance of their day, like Braid and Esdaile, began to use the power instead of an anæsthetic for

small operations. What were the opponents to do? Braid gave them their chance, for he had named the coma produced by mesmerism hypnosis. The new word caught on, and the whole world began to agree that hypnotism was a fact, without mentioning that the mesmerism which they had denied so long was exactly the same thing.

Of course, it is not to be denied that Mesmer made mistakes, just as spiritualists have made mistakes but in each case the essentials were permanent. Some of these days perhaps history will repeat itself. Spiritualism will change its name, which is certainly a very clumsy one, and then everyone can save their face and admit its existence.



A further instalment will appear

in

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(Continued from February)

It would surprise scientists if they realised that it is on their attitude to this despised subject and not upon their own special work that their future name and fame will rest, among the bulk of the people.

At the present moment, great as is the position of Wallace or Crookes, they are quoted a hundred times on psychic subjects for once that their material work is alluded to. As to men like Brewster or Carpenter, it is not too much to say that they would be practically forgotten were it not for their unenviable hostility to spiritualism.

The reputation of great men like Huxley, Tyndall and Lord Kelvin will suffer from their obstructive attitude; while Hare, De Morgan, Zollner and others will be immortalised by their support of the rising truth. Crawford, I will venture to predict, will stand in the very forefront of our science in the eyes of our descendants, as will another spiritualist, Prayson, the astronomer. It may be countered that these are only my individual impressions, and this of course is true, but I set them down for future reference.

It is a curious and suggestive reflection that the psychic truth of 1850 stands where it did, with some important additions but no subtractions, while the science which derided it, has so changed that there is hardly one point which has been able to hold its place. The changing of species, the divisibility of the atom, the transformation of one metal into another, are but a few of the revolutionary views which have supplanted the old doctrines.

The radical mistake which science has made in investigating the subject is that it has never troubled to grasp the fact that it is not the medium who is pro-

ducing the phenomena. It has always treated him as if he were a conjuror, and said, "Do this or do that," failing to understand that little or nothing comes *from* him, but all or nearly all comes *through* him. I say "nearly" all, for I believe that some simple phenomena such as a rap, can within limits be produced by the medium's own will.

It is this false view of science which has prevented sceptics from realising that a gentle and receptive state of mind on the part of sitters, and an easy natural atmosphere for the medium are absolutely essential in order to produce harmony with the outside forces.

If in the greatest of all seances, that of the upper room on the day of Pentecost an aggressive sceptic had insisted upon test conditions of his own foolish devising, where would the rushing wind and the tongues of fire have been? "All with one accord," says the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, and that is the essential condition. I have sat with saintly people, and I too have felt the rushing wind, seen the flickering tongues and heard the great voice, but how could such results come where harmony did not reign?

That is the radical mistake which science has made. Men know well that even in their own coarse material work the presence of a scrap of metal may upset the whole balance of a great magnetic instalment, and yet they will not take the word of those who are in a position to speak from experience that a psychic condition may upset a psychic experiment.

But indeed when we speak of science in this connection it is a confusion of thought. The fact that a man is a great zoologist like Ray Lankester, or a great physicist like Tyndall or Faraday, does not give his opinion any weight in a subject which is outside his own speciality. There is many an unknown Smith and Jones whose twenty years of practical work have put him in a far stronger position than that of these intolerant scientists; while as to the real spiritualist and seers men of many experiences and much roaring and

thought, it is they who are the real scientific experts who are in a position to teach the world. One does not lose one's judgment when one becomes a spiritualist. One is as much a researcher as ever, but one understands better what it is that one is studying and how to study it.

This controversy with bumptious and ignorant people is a mere passing thing which matters nothing. The real controversy, which does matter very much, is between the Continental school who study ectoplasm and other semi-material manifestations, but who have not got the length of seeing independent spirit behind them. Richet, Schrenck Notzing and other great investigators are still in this midway position, and Flammarion is little more advanced. Richet goes the length of admitting that he has assured himself by personal observation of the materialised form that it can walk and talk and leave moulds of its hands. So far he has gone. And yet even now he clings to the idea that these phenomena may be the externalisation of some latent powers of the human body and mind.

Such an explanation seems to me to be the desperate defence of the last trench by one of those old-time materialists, who say with Brewster: "Spirit is the last thing which we will concede," adding as their reason, "it upsets the work of fifty years". It is hard when a man has taught all his life that the brain governs spirit, to have to learn after all that it may be spirit which acts independently of the human brain. But it is their supermaterialism which is the real difficulty with which we now have to contend.

And what is the end of it all?

I have no idea. How could those who first noted the electric twitching of muscles foresee the Atlantic cable or the arc lamp? Our information is that some great shock is coming very shortly to the human race which will finally break down its apathy and which will be accompanied by such psychic signs that the survivors will be unable any longer to deny the truths which we preach.

The real meaning of our movement will then be seen, for it will become apparent that we have accustomed the public mind to such ideas, and provided a body of definite teaching, both scientific and religious, to which they can turn for guidance.

As to the prophecy of disaster, I admit that we have to be on our guard. Even the Christ circle was woefully deceived, and declared confidently that the world would not survive their own generation. Various creeds, too, have made vain predictions of the end of the world.

I am keenly aware of all this, and also of the difficulty in reckoning time when seen from the other side. But, making every allowance for this, the information upon the point has been so detailed, and has reached me from so many entirely independent sources, that I have been forced to take it seriously and to think that some great watershed of human experience may be passed within a few years—the greatest, we are told, that our long-suffering race has yet encountered.

People who have not gone into the subject may well ask: 'What do you get out of it? How are you the better?' We can only answer that all life has changed to us since this definite knowledge has come. No longer are we shut in by death. We are out of the valley and up on the ridge, with vast clear vistas before us.

Why should we fear a death of which we know for certain is the doorway to unutterable happiness?

Why should we fear our dear ones' death if we can be so near to them afterwards?

Am I not far nearer to my son than if he were alive and serving in that Army Medical Service which would have taken him to the ends of the earth? There is never a month, often never a week, that I do not commune with him. Is it not evident that such facts as these change the whole aspect of life, and turn the grey mist of dissolution into a rosy dawn?

You may say that we have already all these assurances in the Christian revelation. It is true, and that

is why we are not anti-Christians so long as Christianity is the teaching of the humble Christ and not of his arrogant representatives.

Every form of Christianity is represented in our ranks, often by clergymen of the various denominations. But there is nothing precise in the definitions of the other world as given in the holy writings. The information we have depicts a heaven of congenial work and of congenial play, with every mental and physical activity of life carried on to a higher plane—a heaven of art, of science, of intellect, of organisation, of combat with evil, of home circles, of flowers, of wide travel, of sports, of the mating of souls of complete harmony. This is what our 'dead' friends describe.

On the other hand we hear from them, and sometimes directly, of the hells, which are temporary spheres of purification. We hear of the mists, the darkness, the aimless wanderings, the mental confusion, the remorse.

'Our condition is horrible', wrote one of them to me recently at a seance. These things are real and vivid and provable to us. That is why we are an enormous force for the resuscitation of true religion, and why the clergy take a heavy responsibility when they oppose us.

The final result upon scientific thought is unthinkable, save that the sources of all force would be traced rather to spiritual than to material causes.

In religion one can perhaps see a little more clearly. Theology and dogma would disappear.

People would realise that such questions as the number of persons in God, or the process of Christ's birth, have no bearing at all upon the development of man's spirit, which is the sole object of life.

All religions would be equal, for all alike produce gentle, unselfish souls who are God's elect. Christian Jew, Buddhist and Mohammedan would shed their distinctive doctrines, follow their own high teachers

on a common path of morality, and forget all that antagonism which has made religion a curse rather than a blessing to the world.

We shall be in close touch with other world forces and knowledge will supersede that faith which has in the past planted a dozen different signposts to point in as many different directions.

Such will be the future, so far as I can dimly see it and all this will spring from the seed which now we tend and water amid the cold blasts of a hostile world.